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ABSTRACT

The implementation of the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) began in English primary schools at the start of the autumn term, 1998. It was intended to bring about "a dramatic improvement in literacy standards," so that, by 2002, 80% of all 11 year olds should reach level 4 in English at the end of Key Stage 2 national curriculum tests. This report provides an overview of the first four years and is the fifth report on the NLS published by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED). It summarizes the standards attained by pupils; analyzes the changes in teaching methods brought about by the strategy; and suggests areas where further work is needed. It also discusses the impact of the NLS on the rest of the curriculum; the effect of the program on minority ethnic pupils, boys, and pupils with special education needs; leadership and management; and training and support. Includes an annex which summarizes the results of the English tests taken by the pupils in Years 3, 4, and 5. (PM)

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Office for Standards in Education

The National Literacy Strategy: the first four years 1998–2002

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The National Literacy Strategy: the first four years 1998–2002

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Introduction and evidence base

1. The implementation of the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) began in English primary schools at the start of the autumn term, 1998. It was intended to bring about 'a dramatic improvement in literacy standards', so that, by 2002, 80% of 11 year olds should reach level 4 in English at the end of Key Stage 2 national curriculum tests.

2. This report provides an overview of the first four years and is the fifth report on the NLS published by Ofsted. It summarises the standards attained by pupils, analyses the changes in teaching methods brought about by the strategy and suggests areas where further work is needed.

3. Ofsted, through Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI), inspected the implementation and impact of the NLS in a nationally representative sample of 300 primary schools from 1998 to 2002, visiting most of the schools at least five times over the course of the evaluation. They observed the teaching of literacy and held discussions with key personnel. HMI also inspected training and regularly met NLS literacy consultants, their line managers in local education authorities (LEAs) and the regional directors of the strategy. Evidence from section 10 inspections and a telephone survey of 50 headteachers was also taken into account.

4. In addition to the inspections, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) established an annual testing programme to provide data on pupils' attainment and progress in English in Years 3, 4 and 5. These data, collected and analysed by the National Foundation for Education Research (NFER), augment those already available through the national curriculum tests of Year 2 and Year 6 pupils. An annex to this report, produced by the QCA, summarises the results of the English tests taken by the pupils in Years 3, 4 and 5. A fuller version is available on the QCA web site (www.qca.org.uk).

5. HMI will continue to monitor and report on the National Literacy Strategy from 2002 to 2004 in a new national sample of schools.

Main findings

- The National Literacy Strategy has had a significant impact on the standards attained in English and on the quality of teaching over the last four years. Nevertheless, it has not been sufficiently effective overall to enable the government to meet its target for literacy, namely that 80% of 11 year olds should attain at least level 4 in English in the 2002 national curriculum tests.

- Headteachers' leadership and management of the NLS continue to improve, but are weak in one in ten schools. If this figure were extrapolated to schools nationally, this would represent nearly 2000 schools. The problems identified in the first year of implementation have not changed. The headteachers in these schools are unfamiliar with how the strategy is developing; they lack knowledge and skill in setting targets; and they delegate responsibility without providing enough support. Put simply, they do not do enough to make a difference to the quality of teaching in their schools.

- In successful schools, the NLS has been effective, not just in raising standards in literacy, but also in improving the quality of teaching and learning in other subjects. There is more direct teaching, the lessons have a clearer structure and learning objectives are more precise. The strategy has increased the pace of teaching and raised teachers' expectations.

- The progress made by some of the lowest-attaining schools over the last four years makes it very clear that significant improvements are possible. It is undoubtedly harder for some schools than for others to change teaching and raise standards, but even in areas of social deprivation and staffing difficulties, just under half of the schools have made good progress.

- Pressure on the whole curriculum remains, but there are signs of improvement. Evidence from section 10 inspections shows that there are more schools this year, around four in ten, where the balance and breadth of the curriculum are good. Better timetabling of subjects and better links between literacy and other subjects are beginning to make a difference.

- After a very uncertain start, there has been a marked shift in teachers' understanding of and attitudes towards the place of phonics in teaching reading and spelling. The encouraging rise in the test results in spelling this year is almost certainly evidence of the difference that the teaching of phonics has made for both boys and girls at the end of Key Stage 1. In the reception year (Year R) and Key Stage 1, however, teachers still do not give enough emphasis to the application of phonic skills during shared reading.

- There has not been enough improvement in the teaching of phonics in Years 3 and 4. Teachers still do not understand sufficiently its importance for these two year groups in improving reading and spelling.

- Weaknesses persist in the teaching of guided reading at both key stages in around one in ten lessons. These weaknesses are long-standing. There are also difficulties with the timetabling of guided reading.

- More often than not, the best-performing schools show strengths in assessment. In schools where standards have remained static or have fallen, day-to-day assessment is often poorly understood.

- The NLS framework has enabled schools to teach the national curriculum programmes of study for reading and writing directly and more effectively. It has contributed significantly to improving continuity. It has also prompted teachers to consider how and when to teach literacy in other areas of the curriculum. At present,

however, few schools have a coherent planned approach to the teaching of literacy in other subjects.

- There are some weaknesses, however, in the NLS framework. In particular, the 'searchlights' model of reading gives insufficient emphasis in the early stages to the teaching of phonics. Furthermore, the framework does not set out with sufficient clarity the phonic knowledge and skills that pupils need to be taught from the reception year to Year 4.

- Teachers also recognise that they need to give more attention to speaking, listening and drama. Despite acknowledging this, however, they rarely plan in detail for these important aspects of the curriculum.

- The majority of teaching assistants provide valuable support. They are now invariably part of an effective teaching team, taking significant responsibility for groups and individuals, as well as providing effective support during whole-class teaching. This is a marked improvement since the first year of the strategy.

- The NLS consultants in LEAs have been important catalysts in changing practice in schools and improving the quality of teaching. They have developed their own knowledge and skills and have used these expertly to support schools and individual teachers. They have been most effective where they have worked closely with schools to identify and follow up specific areas for development with training and advice.

- The quality of support provided by LEAs for the NLS has been uneven over the course of implementation and there has been little change in the past year. Although the majority of LEAs have put in place appropriate systems to monitor and support their schools' implementation of the strategy, a small number of LEAs continue to cause concern.

- Attainment in English at the end of Key Stage 2, as measured by the national curriculum test results, has not changed since 2000. The proportion of pupils reaching level 4 or above in English remains at 75%. Test results in writing show a rise of three percentage points since 2001, continuing the steady upward trend since 1999. There has been a decline in results for reading, however, which have now fallen for the second year running, albeit by only one and two percentage points respectively. Despite the continued improvements in writing, pupils' attainment in this area is still too low and lags behind attainment in reading.

- At Key Stage 1, attainment at level 2 or above in reading and writing, as measured by the national curriculum test results in 2002, has not changed since 2001. There were no improvements in reading, where attainment remains at 84%, or in writing (86%) for those pupils attaining level 2 or above. Spelling results improved by three percentage points to 78%. On the 2B benchmark, there has also been no change in reading this year, where results remained at 69%, but there has been an improvement of one percentage point in writing at this level for both boys and girls. These results show that nearly one third of pupils still transfer to Key Stage 2 with reading skills below level 2B; in writing, four in ten pupils transfer with attainment below this level, including almost half of all boys.

- Girls continue to do better than boys in English at both key stages; they are now nine percentage points ahead of boys at the end of Key Stage 2, but this compares with a gap of 16 points at the end of 1998. At Key Stage 1, the gender gap is most marked in writing and spelling: at level 2 and above, girls outperform boys by eight percentage points in writing and by 10 percentage points in spelling. At level 2B and above, the gap between the attainment of boys and girls in writing is 15 percentage points. This wide gap continues to be a cause for concern.

Points for action

6. To build on the improvements in teaching over the last four years and to make further progress on standards, those with **national responsibility** for the management of the strategy should:

- undertake a critical review of the NLS, paying particular attention to the clarity and usefulness of the framework as a tool for improving standards in literacy across the whole curriculum
- review and consolidate the guidance on the teaching of phonics, with a focus on the teaching of phonics and spelling in Years 3 and 4
- provide further guidance for all teachers on teaching guided reading, including how to combine direct teaching of a small group with worthwhile activities for the rest of the class
- provide guidance for schools on how to tackle the widening gap between the standard of boys' and girls' writing at both key stages.

7. Those with responsibility for the strategy at **LEA level** should:

- continue to focus efforts on the one school in ten where the leadership and management of the strategy are weak and to see this as a matter for the whole-school improvement service
- support NLS consultants in analysing schools' specific needs and in providing training and guidance to meet them, particularly in schools where there is underachievement.

8. To achieve the improvements that are needed, **all schools** should:

- continue to monitor the attainment and teaching of boys at both key stages and ensure that all possible strategies are used to improve boys' literacy
- ensure that the teaching of literacy is part of a coherent, planned English curriculum, covering the full national curriculum programmes of study
- increase the amount and quality of phonics teaching in Years 3 and 4
- improve teachers' knowledge of day-to-day assessment strategies so that subsequent teaching can be based upon better diagnosis of pupils' needs.

9. Schools where attainment in English is below average in comparison with similar schools should:

- establish a clear plan of improvement which is discussed with and understood by all staff; use the analysis of data to form a clear picture of all pupils' strengths and weaknesses, and match teaching and training to the areas where improvements are needed
- set curricular targets for groups of pupils and, where relevant, for individual pupils, monitor regularly their progress towards them and evaluate the extent to which they are achieved
- focus training carefully on the school's needs, seeking outside support if necessary to identify areas of weakness
- monitor and evaluate closely the impact of training and build on the findings.

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Standards of achievement and pupils' progress

10. Attainment in English at the end of Key Stage 2, as measured by the national curriculum test results, has not changed since 2000. The proportion of pupils reaching level 4 or above in English at the end of Key Stage 2 in the national curriculum Year 6 tests, has remained at 75% for the third consecutive year. Test results in writing showed a rise of three percentage points this year, following a two-point rise in 2001, which is encouraging, but results for reading have declined over the last two years by three percentage points. Despite the continued improvements in writing, pupils' attainment in this area is still too low, however, and lags behind attainment in reading. Boys continue to do less well than girls at both key stages.

11. The gap between the performance of boys and girls at level 4 in English narrowed from 16 points in 1998 to 9 points in 1999. Since then, however, it has not changed significantly. Although the gap at the age of 11, reported in 2000 and 2001, has narrowed this year by one percentage point in English and in reading, girls have extended their lead in writing by one percentage point. Girls are now 16 percentage points ahead of boys in writing at the end of Key Stage 2. This is exactly the same gap as in 1998, at the outset of the strategy. Since then, the performance of both boys and girls in writing has improved by seven percentage points.

12. There has been no overall change in the proportion of pupils achieving level 5 in English, which remains at 29%. Although there has been an increase of three percentage points in writing at level 5 (two percentage points for boys and four for girls), there has been a fall of four percentage points in reading. The performance of girls in reading at level 5 has fallen significantly from 47% in 2001 to 41% in 2002. The gender gap at level 4 is also reflected at level 5, although the gap between boys and girls in reading is much narrower than last year. It is now six percentage points, compared with 11 points in 2001.

13. Figures 1–3 show the results of the English tests at **Key Stage 2** from 1998 to 2002.

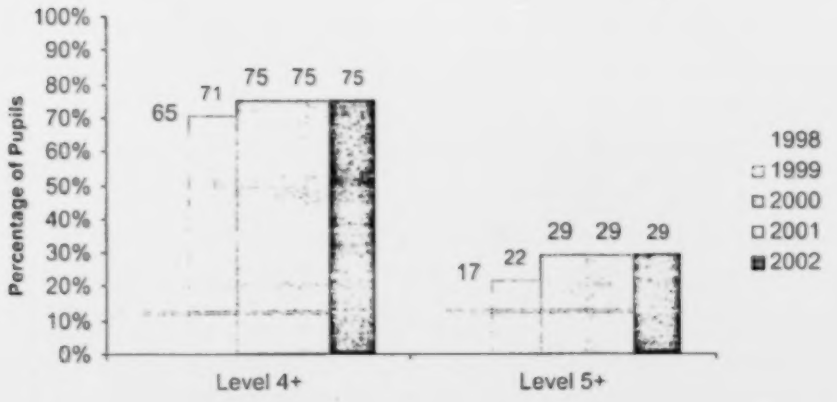

Figure 1. Attainment in national curriculum English tests at Key Stage 2: all pupils

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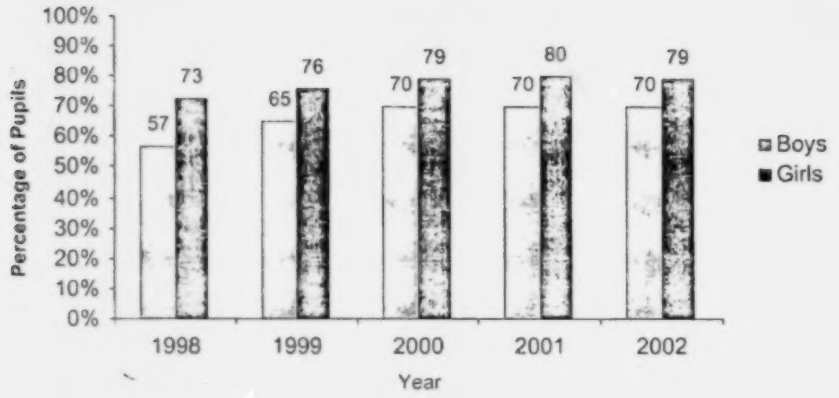

Figure 2. Percentage of pupils achieving level 4 and above in English tests at Key Stage 2: boys and girls

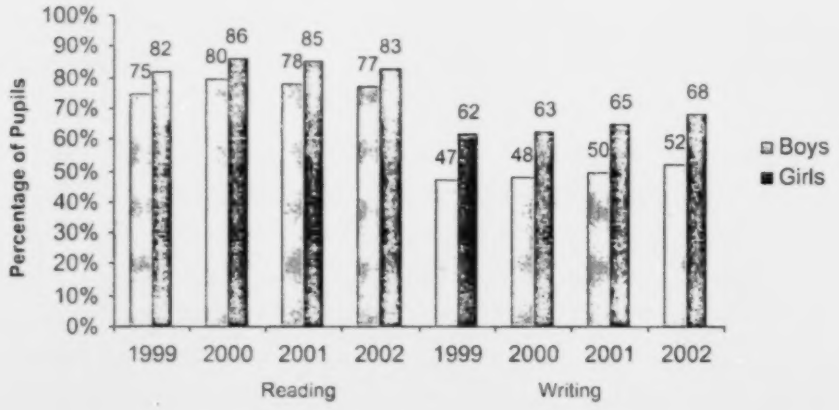

Figure 3. Percentage of pupils achieving level 4 and above in reading and writing tests at Key Stage 2: boys and girls

14. At **Key Stage 1**, at level 2 and above, improvements were most marked in spelling, where attainment rose by an encouraging three percentage points in 2002 to 78%. There were no improvements in reading, where attainment remained at 84%, or in writing (86%) for those pupils attaining level 2 or above. On the 2B benchmark, there was also no change in reading this year, where results remained at 69%, and there was little change in writing at this level for both boys and girls. These results show that nearly one third of pupils still transfer to Key Stage 2 with reading skills below level 2B; in writing, four in ten pupils transfer with attainment below this level, including almost half of all boys.

15. There has been little change in 2002 in the proportion of pupils reaching level 3 or above in reading or writing at Key Stage 1. There was an improvement of one percentage point in reading at level 3 to 30% and of three percentage points in spelling

(to 26%), but no change in writing. The proportion of pupils reaching level 3 in writing remains at 9% for the third successive year.

16. The gender gap in attainment noted at Key Stage 2 is also evident at Key Stage 1. At level 2 and above, girls outperform boys by eight percentage points in writing, by seven points in reading and by 10 points in spelling. At level 2B and above, the gap between the attainment of boys and girls in writing is 15 percentage points. This wide gap continues to be a cause for concern.

17. Figures 4–7 show the results of the English tests at Key Stage 1 from 1998 to 2002.

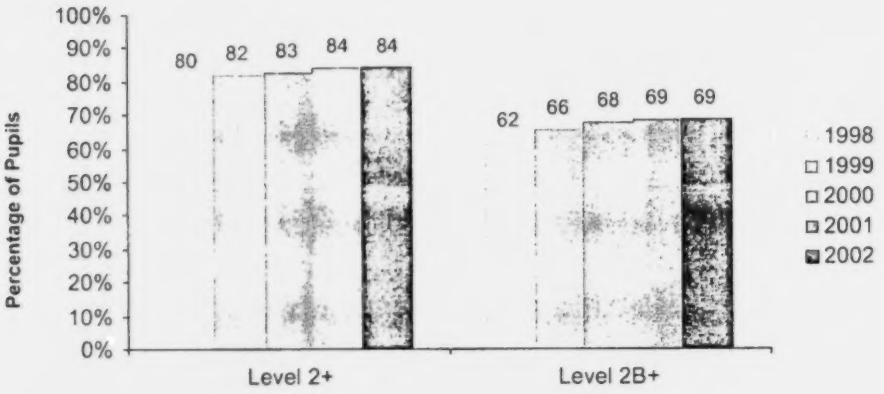

Figure 4. Attainment in national curriculum reading tests at Key Stage 1: all pupils

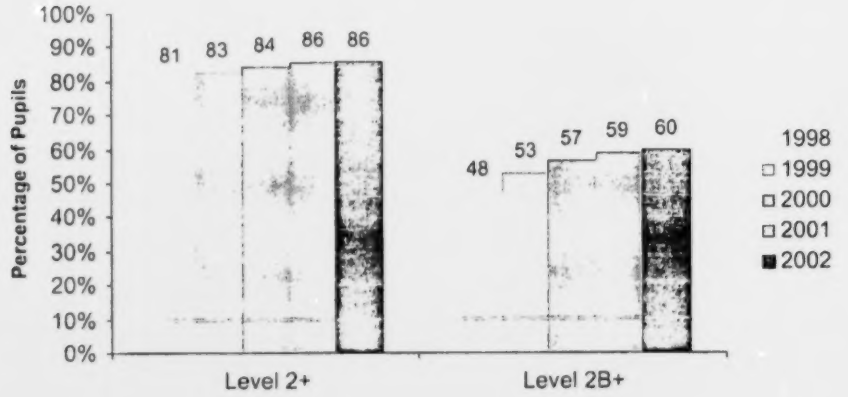

Figure 5. Attainment in national curriculum writing tests at Key Stage 1: all pupils

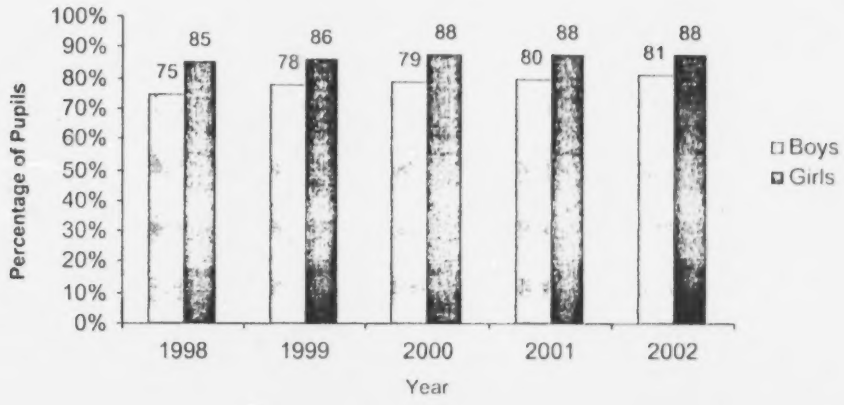

Figure 6. Percentage of pupils achieving level 2 and above in reading tests at Key Stage 1: boys and girls

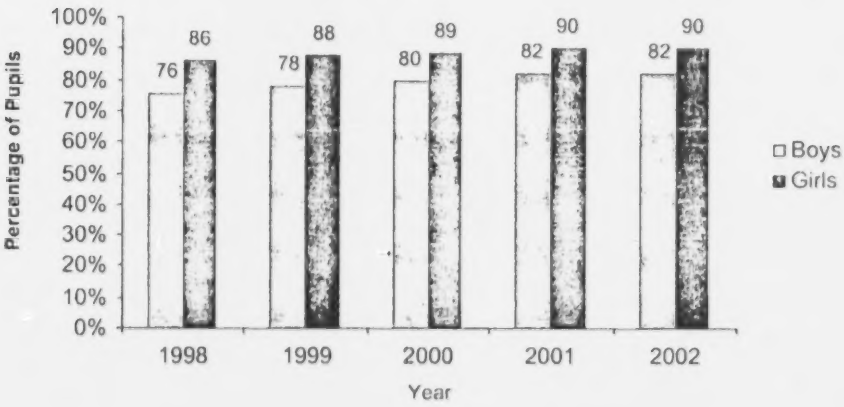

Figure 7. Percentage of pupils achieving level 2 and above in writing tests at Key Stage 1: boys and girls

18. The analysis by NFER of the specially commissioned tests for the schools in the national sample shows minor changes across all ability ranges in reading, writing and spelling, with some exceptions. The number of pupils failing to reach the lowest level measured by these tests has fallen in writing and spelling in all year groups, but has remained the same in reading. The results of the tests in Year 5 are less encouraging. There was a fall of one percentage point in reading in the proportion of pupils reaching level 4 and a fall of three percentage points in writing. Only 10% of Year 5 pupils reached level 4 in writing this year. The results are more encouraging in writing in Year 4, where there was a marked increase in the proportion of pupils reaching level 3 or above, which rose from 26% in 2001 to 38% in 2002. The proportion of Year 4 pupils achieving less than level 2 in writing halved in 2002 to 6% compared with 12% in 1999 when the tests were first used and reported on. For all year groups, the levels of attainment were much greater in reading than in writing.

19. In the first three years of the evaluation, there were significant improvements in pupils' performance in all parts of the specially commissioned literacy tests. Between 2001 and 2002, however, performance in spelling and reading in all year groups and in writing in Year 5 stayed the same. Performance in writing in Years 3 and 4 improved. These findings provide sound statistical evidence that the improvements observed in the first three years of the evaluation, for all groups of pupils, have been maintained during the final year.

20. There are large variations in the aggregated school results across LEAs. Nationally, 37 LEAs have shown an improvement in Year 6 at level 4 and above in English since 2001. The aggregated results fell this year in 71 LEAs, with no change in 37 LEAs. Between 1998 and 2000, 67 LEAs showed continued improvements at level 4 or above and 58 LEAs did so between 1998 and 2001. Only 13 LEAs, however, have shown consistent improvement in their English results at the end of Key Stage 2 each year from 1998 to 2002.

Quality of the teaching of literacy

The teaching of reading

21. Since the start of the strategy, the proportion of lessons where the teaching of shared reading is good has increased from just over half of all lessons to nearly seven in ten. In these lessons, in all year groups, teachers match the text well to the reading levels of the class so that it is within their comprehension levels, but above the independent reading level of the majority. The amount of unsatisfactory teaching of shared reading is now small, although there is room for improvement at both key stages. Shared reading contributed significantly to the encouraging improvements in reading standards during the first two years of the strategy, but this early improvement has not been sustained.

22. From the early stages of the strategy, teachers were particularly successful at introducing pupils to a range of genres, showing them how writers develop characters in fiction and drawing attention to the key features of non-fiction texts. Teachers timed sessions well to ensure that there was sufficient opportunity to cover the material to be taught, but not too much so that pupils' interest waned. Initial problems, such as pupils not being able to see the text from where they were sitting, have largely disappeared because of teachers' better management of these sessions. By the end of the third year, teachers were confident in their understanding of the subject matter to be covered and, increasingly, were using work on shared texts to create effective links between reading and writing at both key stages.

23. In Year R and at Key Stage 1, shared reading is used to teach the conventions of print. Careful repetition of simple phrases assists those who are just beginning to read fluently. There has been a gradual move away from using shared reading as the only means of teaching phonics. Some teachers use shared reading effectively with younger pupils to help them to apply their phonic knowledge and skills, as in this example from a Year 1 class.

> *The teacher displayed a piece of her own writing which she had prepared earlier. Following initial explanation and brief discussion about the subject, the teacher and the pupils read the text together, with the teacher pointing to words, demonstrating and guiding. She indicated the full stops and showed pupils how to take account of them when reading aloud for meaning and expression. Pupils identified words in the text which they thought would be difficult, such as 'Longleat'. The teacher helped them to recognise the letters in the word and blend the phonemes to pronounce it. Following discussion in pairs and oral composition, the pupils wrote on their own.*

This application of phonics in shared reading is valuable, but there are still lessons at Key Stage 1 which do not include the direct teaching of phonics as a free-standing activity.

24. Shared reading is used increasingly with older pupils as a way of introducing a lesson or series of lessons on writing. Most frequently, this takes the form of discussion about a writer's style, the characteristics of a genre or the devices and language authors use to achieve particular effects.

> *In a mixed-age Year 5/6 class, the teacher developed pupils' use of creative language through poetry, re-reading 'The Bully Asleep', read for the first time the previous week. Pupils recounted the events of the poem and recalled their feelings about it. The teacher drew attention to the evocative use of vocabulary, such as the significance of 'stooped' in 'Miss Andrews stooped to see'. The teacher then introduced the poem 'Timothy Winters'. Careful questioning elicited*

pupils' thoughts about how the poem achieved its effects, such as the use of simile and metaphor to evoke images of war. Following discussion about implied meaning, pupils were told to 'go for the implicit' in their own writing. One pupil suggested, 'She ran her fingers all the way from the roots to the tips', instead of 'She had long hair'.

On occasions, however, over-analysis of the text gets in the way of pupils' understanding and personal response.

25. Shared reading is used less frequently to develop pupils' comprehension, for example by helping pupils to move from a literal understanding of the text to appreciating implied meaning, as in the illustration above. Although shared reading is good in seven in ten lessons, there is room for improvement at both key stages. In teaching the whole class, teachers do not always make sure that all pupils are involved fully, especially in reading aloud at Key Stage 1, and that the objectives of the session are clear. Furthermore, shared reading is not always complemented by other approaches to the teaching of reading, especially guided reading, to ensure that pupils make enough progress.

26. The teaching of **guided reading** was often poor at the beginning of the strategy. During the first year of implementation, many teachers did not fully understand what their role should be. Frequently, they heard individual pupils read within the group or pupils simply took turns to read aloud. By the third year, these weaknesses remained in just under one in ten lessons, but guided reading was taught well in six in ten. There was an increasing tendency to move guided reading outside the literacy hour entirely and teach it at other times of the day, often while the rest of the class read in silence.

27. There has been no change in this fourth year in the proportion of lessons where guided reading is taught well and there are still just under one in ten lessons where the teaching is unsatisfactory. The weaknesses in teaching guided reading are long-standing:

- the use of texts which are not pitched at the right reading level
- insufficient emphasis on teaching word- and sentence-level objectives, especially the application of phonic knowledge and skills
- pupils reading around the group with insufficient intervention by the teacher
- too much background noise.

28. Overall, the quality of guided reading is a cause for concern, since it is the best opportunity for most pupils to improve their reading through direct teaching which focuses on their individual needs.

29. In successful guided reading, the teaching is focused clearly on key literacy objectives; these influence the purpose and pace of the teaching from the start. At Key Stage 1, there is a good emphasis on word-level work, particularly phonics, some of which arises incidentally and some of which is identified clearly in planning. In these sessions, there is a strong sense of intensive teaching and learning, with pupils reading with concentration under the teacher's watchful eye. The teacher prepares the pupils well for these sessions, reminding them of reading strategies, drawing attention to key vocabulary and discussing content, so that the pupils are able to make very good attempts at reading independently.

30. At Key Stage 2, there is, appropriately, a greater emphasis on pupils' response to texts and more teaching of sentence- and text-level objectives. The teaching of comprehension in the successful guided reading sessions is good. The teachers extend

pupils' vocabulary well and make good use of opportunities to reinforce decoding skills when pupils encounter difficult words. There is more silent reading than at Key Stage 1, but the teachers' questions probe pupils' understanding and interpretation of the text carefully. Effective use is often made of homework, enabling the guided reading sessions to start positively because of the reading pupils have already done.

31. A guided reading session in a Year 4/5 class provides a good illustration of teaching which is matched successfully to pupils' needs and provides them with a challenge.

> *The teacher had chosen a new book,* Arthur, High King of Britain, *for the guided reading session. As well as copies of the text, the pupils had photocopies of a three-page extract. The session's objectives were to develop pupils' understanding of figurative language and the use of personification. The pupils were encouraged to write notes on sections of the text or to underline key words and phrases; they used these well to contribute to discussion. The discussion of the text was very well managed. The teacher's own expressive reading of parts of the text was used very well to make teaching points and provided an excellent model. She drew the pupils' attention to the symbolic contrasts in the extract: the fear conveyed by the sea and the hope conveyed by the bell. The standards of reading, comprehension and discussion were very high.*

The teaching of writing

32. In the first year of the strategy, the teaching of reading predominated over the teaching of writing, both in quantity and quality. HMI reported that, 'Good shared writing was much less common than good shared reading'.[1] In particular, the links between shared writing, sentence-level work and independent tasks were not clear. The teaching of writing has improved since then. There is more direct teaching of writing, particularly shared writing, but there is still work to be done on consolidating and using, in other subjects, aspects of writing introduced in the literacy hour.

33. At the end of the fourth year, just over two in three **shared writing** sessions are good. The highest proportion of good teaching is in Year 6 – nearly eight in ten lessons are good. Last year's report highlighted successful teachers' very good knowledge and understanding of language and their skills in discussing the particular grammatical characteristics of the genres being studied. The importance of these characteristics remains, along with an emphasis on oral composition before writing and re-reading the text afterwards. This year, teachers are making better links between shared writing, sentence-level work and the subsequent independent activities. There is more integration of these elements, both within lessons and across a series of lessons.

34. In the first year of the strategy, shared writing took up about one in five of the shared text sessions. In the second year, teachers began to adapt the first two parts of the hour and link the teaching of grammatical skills and knowledge to composition. The improvements were consolidated in the third year. The *Grammar for Writing* training had a positive impact, particularly on teachers' knowledge of grammar and awareness of the key teaching approaches: demonstration by the teacher, the teacher writing the pupils' contributions on the board and supported composition. The training has also been important in raising teachers' expectations.

35. In the first year of the strategy, **sentence-level work** was taught well in half the lessons and was unsatisfactory in one in five. The range of the work was often narrow and it was frequently taught separately from other parts of the literacy hour, especially work on shared texts.

[1] The National Literacy Strategy: an evaluation of the first year of the National Literacy Strategy, *Ofsted, 1999.*

36. There has been a small improvement in the quality of the teaching of sentence-level work. Nearly six in ten sessions are now good compared with half last year. One in ten sessions is unsatisfactory. At best, teachers link the sentence-level work directly to shared writing, helping pupils to make choices about grammar to improve the quality of their writing. There are still too many lessons, however, where the sentence-level work is not integrated effectively into the increasingly good shared writing, and where independent and guided writing are not used to follow these up in the remaining part of the lesson.

37. The annual improvements in the teaching of **guided writing** have continued this year. Last year, just over half the sessions were good and one in seven was unsatisfactory. Six in ten sessions are now good; just under one in ten is unsatisfactory. Teachers are now clearer about the purpose of guided writing and they recognise how it develops work begun earlier in the lesson. However, there is still some way to go before these sessions are as good as the teaching of shared writing. In almost all year groups, there is a gap between the best shared and guided writing. In Year 4 this year, for example, three in four of the shared writing sessions were good compared with just under half of the guided writing ones. The quality of guided writing is not yet good enough to provide an effective complement to the shared writing; the potential of good shared writing is diminished as a result.

Use of independent and group work

38. The quality of independent and group work has shown some modest improvement at the end of the fourth year. Half of the sessions are good – the proportion was just under half last year – and the proportion of weak teaching in this part of the literacy hour is now one in seven lessons compared with one in five 12 months ago.

39. A number of factors have contributed to improving what has been one of the weaker parts of the literacy hour over the previous three years:

- more lessons give pupils opportunities to work on group and independent writing tasks which build on earlier shared text work
- the level of challenge of these tasks has increased
- teachers have become more skilful in organising the independent and group tasks.

40. However, areas for improvement remain. There are difficulties when teachers ask pupils to work independently on tasks which have not been demonstrated or explained clearly to the whole class. As a result, too many pupils do not understand what they have to do and fail to develop the skills of writing independently.

41. The small improvement in the quality of independent work requires consolidation. Despite the training which has been provided, especially on the teaching of writing, it has not yet had a decisive impact on the quality of work in this important part of the literacy hour. It is particularly important, as last year's report argued, that the independent work should usually be a continuation of the work done by the whole class.

The plenary session and assessment

42. The teaching of the plenary session has remained the weakest part of the literacy hour from the beginning. In the first year, the quality of teaching in plenary sessions was good in only two in five lessons and it was weak in one lesson in five. These proportions remained exactly the same during the second and third years, although there has now been some improvement. The quality of teaching is at least satisfactory in eight out of

ten lessons and good in just under half. The amount of weak teaching has fallen significantly: it is unsatisfactory in just over one in ten lessons, compared with one in five in 2001.

43. Effective closing plenary sessions occur where the teacher has made the learning objectives precise and has given the pupils tasks that relate to the main theme of the lesson. He or she is then able to focus on and evaluate a specific element of learning with the whole class. Sufficient time is given to review the work so that the teacher can tackle any misunderstandings. In addition, through detailed and targeted questioning or very brief tasks, the teacher gains a good idea of the progress made and is then able to plan or adapt subsequent work to reflect this.

> *In a Year 5 class, the teacher conducted an excellent plenary session that provided a valuable, critical review of completed work. The class had been writing poems, using as a model a Michael Rosen poem, 'Eddie and the Shreddies', which they had enjoyed. Several pupils read their work to the rest of the class. The teacher helped them to develop their writing by asking, 'Would you be happy if we make some suggestions about what you could do next?' As they read, she paused the reading tactfully to highlight strengths and give praise. She helped them to think about their writing, explored their thinking and helped them to make progress by asking, 'Would he go to sleep? What might he do?' She then helped them to frame further ideas orally and modelled the language for them. She encouraged ideas from the rest of the class and added some of her own, 'You know what I could imagine Eddie doing…'.*

44. In another effective plenary session, the teacher in a Year 2 class used it to consolidate teaching points and provide a link to the next lesson. She concentrated attention on a group of pupils who had been writing a booklet, so that their work provided a model for the other pupils who were to do a similar task later.

> *She drew a great deal out of this session, asking questions to focus pupils on what they needed to learn. 'She has used the word "you"– how would we write that word? Does it need a capital letter? Why not? Can you see how she has written this word? Write it for me in the air.' She reinforced many teaching points in a well-spent few minutes, and then went on to set each child in the group a target for 'next time', finally giving a related homework task to all.*

45. If this momentum of improvement is to be increased, teachers need to know how much their pupils have learnt of what they intended to teach and to use this knowledge as a basis for subsequent lessons.

46. More often than not, the best-performing schools show strengths in assessment. They use information from assessment to improve teaching.

> *A school which saw a dip in its English results at the end of Key Stage 2 was prompted to make a strong effort to improve writing, especially that of boys. The headteacher and the literacy co-ordinator carried out thorough reviews of pupils' prior attainment and performance, using test data and other evidence. They discussed the findings with staff and decisions were made about priorities for teaching. These influenced lesson planning and staff training. Overall test results improved markedly between 1999 and 2002. Boys' reading and writing are now good, with no significant differences between their attainment and that of girls. There was also a good increase in the numbers of pupils gaining level 5 at the end of Key Stage 2.*
>
> *In another school, where a high proportion of pupils were eligible for free school meals, all pupils had individual, termly meetings with their teachers during which their previous targets, derived from day-to-day assessment and marking of their*

work, were reviewed and new ones set. Each pupil was encouraged to play an active role in appraising his or her writing and in considering their progress towards their own targets. After marking the work of one Year 6 pupil, her teacher set her the target to 'write more complex sentences by changing clauses and phrases around for interest'. Shortly afterwards, the pupil was writing sentences such as: 'A bit of a loner, she preferred to be….'. The school was clear about which aspects of reading and writing pupils found difficult and focused staff training on improving the teaching of these aspects. The monitoring of teaching focused on the impact of this training on pupils' learning. During the course of the implementation of the NLS, there was a steady improvement in the standards achieved in comparison with similar schools.

47. In many ways, assessment is the key to improvement and higher standards. In schools where standards have remained static or have fallen, assessment is often poorly understood.

Teaching of phonics and spelling

48. As last year, word-level work continues to be included in virtually all lessons in Year R. This is invariably the teaching of phonics and the majority of these lessons are good. The amount of word-level work in Years 1 and 2 has increased. In 2001, one in six lessons contained none; this figure has now reduced to one in 12. The quality of teaching is good in two thirds of lessons. The rise of three percentage points at level 2 in the national test results in spelling this year is almost certainly evidence of the difference that the teaching of phonics is beginning to make for both boys and girls at the end of Key Stage 1.

49. There has also been an increase in Years 3 and 4 in the amount of word-level work which is taught. In 2001, fewer than half of lessons in these year groups contained word-level work. This has now risen to two thirds, although even where it is taught, the word-level work still does not necessarily include phonics or spelling. Where word-level work is taught, it is good in three in five lessons and unsatisfactory in just over one in six.

50. The extent and quality of the teaching in Year R and Key Stage 1 reflect the significant shift which has taken place since HMI reported, after two terms of implementation, that 'phonics was either not taught at all or was not taught well in just under one half of all lessons from Year R to Year 4'. The overall improvements in Year R and Key Stage 1, however, have not extended to Key Stage 2.

51. The weaknesses reported at the end of the first year about the teaching of phonics in Years 3 and 4 remain. They continue to cause concern. At that time, just over four in ten lessons in Years 3 and 4 included no phonics. HMI reported that:

Many of these pupils still need daily, systematic teaching of phonics to continue the development of their reading as well as their spelling. … As many as four out of ten teachers of pupils in Years 3 and 4 do not seem to appreciate the importance of continuing with the systematic teaching of phonics for many pupils well into Key Stage 2.[2]

52. A significant part of the problem in Years 3 and 4 is that much of the time in the part of the literacy hour which teachers are recommended to spend on phonics is spent on teaching other word-level objectives. These other objectives would be taught more effectively within shared and guided reading and writing, such as common vocabulary for introducing and concluding dialogue, the use of a thesaurus and a dictionary, synonyms and antonyms. Yet teachers omit the teaching of phonics and spelling, even

[2] The National Literacy Strategy: an evaluation of the first year, *Ofsted, 1999.*

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when the pupils clearly need further teaching in these areas. This typical extract describes the second 15 minutes of a literacy hour for a Year 2/3 class which should have included the teaching of phonics.

> *Sound recap of previous work on tenses. Good consolidation of work on speech marks as the teacher models the writing. Attention is drawn effectively to the need for and the use of commas when punctuating direct speech. This is followed by satisfactory shared reading of the text written with the pupils by the teacher. The weakness of this lesson is that no attention is given to phonics nor is any planned for this week. Given the levels of attainment, there should have been.*

53. In another school, with a high percentage of minority ethnic pupils, the end of key stage test results had been low for some time with no noticeable improvement. Despite this, in the Year 3 class, where 20 of the 24 pupils spoke English as an additional language, no phonics was taught at all. In the second part of a literacy hour, the teacher used the big book read in the first part of the lesson to discuss antonyms, before moving on to discuss the roots of words. There was too much emphasis on discussing the roots of words rather than on the phonic knowledge and skills needed to spell them.

54. Overall, there has not been enough improvement in the teaching of phonics in Years 3 and 4. In their paper on the teaching of phonics, HMI wrote:

> *Good word-level knowledge and skills, particularly phonics, are critically important for spelling which, in turn, has a strong impact on pupils' ability to express themselves fluently and confidently in writing. The NLS framework is clear that objectives for word-level work throughout Years 3 and 4 include revision and consolidation of the phonic knowledge and skills which should have been taught at Key Stage 1, as well as new work on spelling.*[3]

In too many schools, the importance of phonics in Years 3 and 4 has still not been understood.

Overview: the NLS framework for teaching

55. At this stage, it is appropriate to consider the extent to which the framework for teaching has provided effective, comprehensive guidance and has succeeded in altering and improving teaching methods and organisation. The extent to which it has raised standards is clear from the pattern of test results since 1999, since virtually all primary schools in England have adopted it. It is time to review its strengths and weaknesses, however, given the lack of improvement in standards in English overall at the end of Key Stage 2 over the last two years.

56. Without doubt, the literacy hour has improved the entitlement to literacy for all pupils and has led to a significant increase in direct teaching and a much greater degree of consistent teaching than ever before. The framework has provided generally clear guidance on the structure of the hour and teaching methods which has benefited many teachers, particularly supply teachers and those who do not consider themselves to be English specialists. The most skilled and confident teachers have already learnt to adapt the hour and use the objectives in ways that work best for them.

57. Shared reading has been crucial in altering the teaching of reading at both key stages and in Year R, but the results of the national tests in 2001 and 2002 indicate that it has not yet proved its worth fully. Too much analysis of texts, particularly at Key Stage 2 as a prelude to shared writing, has reduced the amount of time that teachers spend in encouraging pupils' comprehension and personal response. Further, the amount of time which is allocated to the literacy hour may have reduced the time available elsewhere to

[3] Teaching of phonics: a paper by HMI, *Ofsted, 2001.*

read and discuss whole texts. Although the 1996 HMI report on the teaching of reading noted that, in some schools, the regular reading of a story at the end of a day 'appeared to be treated more as end-of-day relaxation than as opportunities for whole-class teaching and discussion', there is now a danger that the pendulum has swung too far the other way and that the reading of whole texts receives too little attention.[4] In Year R and Key Stage 1, teachers still do not give enough emphasis to the application of phonic blending skills during shared reading. At both key stages, and in Year R, teachers need to maintain the subtle balance, in teaching shared reading, between developing pupils' informed personal response and enthusiasm and teaching reading skills directly. At Key Stage 1, there is too much emphasis on the former and, at Key Stage 2, too much on the latter.

58. The 'searchlights' model proposed in the framework has not been effective enough in terms of illustrating where the intensity of the 'searchlights' should fall at the different stages of learning to read. While the full range of strategies is used by fluent readers, beginning readers need to learn how to decode effortlessly, using their knowledge of letter-sound correspondences and the skills of blending sounds together. The importance of these crucial skills and knowledge has not been communicated clearly enough to teachers. The result has been an approach to word-level work which diffuses teaching at the earliest stages, rather than concentrating it on phonics.

59. The framework suggests word- or sentence-level work should take place in the second 15 minutes of the hour. It is increasingly the case that teachers begin their daily literacy hour with such work. This trend should be encouraged. It helps to ensure that phonics is given a secure place in the literacy hour and that the lesson begins with lively, direct teaching. In Year R and Key Stage 1, the daily 15 or so minutes given to word-level work should consist largely of the teaching of phonics, leaving the other word-level objectives to be taught in the context of shared reading, shared writing and guided work. Because of the way the word-level objectives are set out in the framework, however, teachers in Year R and Key Stage 1 feel compelled to teach all types of word-level objectives in the first 15 minutes, not simply phonics. This reduces the potential effectiveness both of the hour's structure and of the objectives.

60. There is much about the framework, especially the range and precision of the writing objectives, that has improved the overall quality of pupils' writing. There are also fewer organisational difficulties within the hour in teaching writing than in teaching reading. Recent guidance and training on the teaching of writing – *Grammar For Writing* and *Developing Early Writing* – have included helpful descriptions of approaches to shared writing: 'teacher scribing', 'supported composition' and 'teacher demonstration'. Few teachers, however, know enough about when to use these to best effect or, crucially, how to teach the important sentence-level objectives within the context of shared writing – or, indeed, shared reading where they are relevant. Although the training updated teachers' subject knowledge about grammar and, in the case of younger teachers, added substantial new knowledge, teachers whose grammatical knowledge was uncertain are not yet sufficiently confident with it to be able to use it intuitively and responsively in teaching writing. The improvement in the test results for writing last year and this year, however, show that the training and schools' emphasis on the teaching of writing are making a difference.

61. The strategy suggested the value of a carousel of tasks in the third part of the hour. It is increasingly clear that, if reading and writing are to be taught successfully, the independent work is more effective when linked to the work on shared texts which precedes it. The only reason for having five groups during the week, as suggested by the strategy, is for organising the teaching of guided reading or writing. Indeed, there might be occasions when guided writing could be omitted altogether, so that the whole class might move directly from shared writing with the teacher to independent writing.

[4] The teaching of reading in 45 inner London primary schools, *OHted*, 1996.

62. Guided reading remains probably the most effective and efficient way of teaching reading, provided it is done well. This report draws attention, however, to the persistent weaknesses in its teaching at both key stages, as well as difficulties with timetabling it. There are dangers in removing guided reading from the literacy hour to teach it, for example, after lunch when the rest of the class is supposed to be reading silently. This is reminiscent of the practice which HMI criticised in *The teaching of reading in 45 inner London primary schools:*

> *Most classes had a daily session of individual silent reading. In some of these sessions, relatively little progress was made. Children were seen changing their books too frequently and without purpose. Their behaviour in these aimless lessons often deteriorated so that by the end few would be reading anything at all.*

63. Teachers need support to strike the fine balance between, on the one hand, teaching guided reading effectively so that pupils benefit from direct teaching and assessment and, on the other, providing the rest of the class with work at the right level of challenge which the pupils can manage independently. This has never been easy. Further training, together with guidance on how to deal with the rest of the class, is essential.

64. Although there are strong arguments for retaining the literacy hour in more or less its present form, schools need guidance on how to teach and plan for the full national curriculum for English. The daily literacy hour cannot provide enough time to cover all the programmes of study, nor has it ever claimed to deal fully with the programmes of study for speaking and listening.

65. The arguments for retaining a literacy lesson which is exactly one hour in all year groups are less convincing. While the national strategy got under way, it was probably necessary to prescribe a lesson of a set length and structure. It is worth considering whether a shorter lesson, or a series of short sessions, as the strategy has already suggested for Year R, might be a better model for the youngest pupils, and a more extended lesson, at least for part of the week, for older ones. Schools should begin to make these decisions for themselves.

66. The framework and the substantial training during the last four years have altered the teaching of English in ways which it would have been difficult to imagine when *The teaching of reading in 45 inner London primary schools* was published. It is now the right time for those with national responsibility for the strategy to draw together what has been learnt and to summarise this clearly for schools, providing unambiguous guidance about the issues raised here.

The National Literacy Strategy and the curriculum

The impact of the NLS on the rest of the curriculum

67. Previous reports on the impact of the NLS and the National Numeracy Strategy (NNS) have suggested that schools were not providing sufficient breadth or depth in their teaching of the non-core foundation subjects. In a 2002 report on the primary curriculum, HMI reported that headteachers:

> *...perceive this overload to be the result of the strong emphasis on literacy and numeracy, including the various intervention programmes, and the imperative to improve pupils' performance in the national tests for English and mathematics, measured against increasingly higher annual targets.*[1]

68. There has been some improvement, however. A telephone survey of 50 primary headteachers in March 2002, following up a survey conducted with the same headteachers 12 months earlier, found little change in the time given to history, geography and design and technology, but an improvement in the time given to art and design, music and physical education. In around a third of the schools, there were signs of action to redress the balance of the curriculum, including:

- a more flexible approach to timetabling subjects, with more examples of a third subject being taught in the morning in addition to English and mathematics
- improvements in teachers' knowledge of the NLS which helped them to teach aspects of literacy at other times and through other subjects
- more encouragement to staff to make links between subjects, even though subjects were still being planned separately.

69. The report on the primary curriculum described a minority of schools which, while managing to achieve high standards in English, mathematics and science, also provided a broad and exciting curriculum. The report identified the key factors which contributed to the schools' successes:

- strong leadership by the headteacher
- full commitment by staff to the strategy
- detailed whole-school plans
- consistent approaches to teaching in all classes
- good use of links across subjects.

70. Good links between literacy and the teaching of another subject require:

- thorough subject knowledge by teachers, both of literacy and of the subject being taught
- a clear focus for the lesson, with effective and direct teaching of subject-specific concepts, knowledge and skills
- tasks which enable pupils to apply and extend the skills they develop in the literacy hour into other relevant contexts for clearly defined purposes.

[1] The curriculum in successful primary schools, *Ofsted, 2002.*

71. A very good example of pupils using their literacy skills to support learning in personal, health and social education (PHSE) occurred in a Year 5 lesson on smoking:

> *Pupils were given a context for writing that was of great interest to them. Homework and earlier teaching ensured that they had sufficient knowledge of the content. The teacher demonstrated how to write an argument, paying attention to the scientific facts. Lower-attaining pupils were supported further by a well-designed writing frame. The lesson reinforced effectively pupils' understanding of persuasive writing, the use of connectives in constructing an argument and terms such as thesis, reiteration and summary. In the plenary debate, pupils were challenged to defend their arguments on the effects of smoking on health.*

72. More generally, however, such good teaching of literacy across the curriculum is by no means consistent across schools. It often derives from individual teachers and is not embedded firmly enough in the overall approaches of the school. Very few schools plan to teach and consolidate literacy in other subjects in an organised way. They do not make sufficient use of the guidance provided by the QCA and the NLS on their web sites which shows the links between the QCA's published schemes of work and the objectives for writing in the NLS framework.

73. In the lessons where the teaching is unsatisfactory, teachers do not often identify or teach clearly the subject-specific concepts, knowledge and skills. The additional time spent on literacy is at the expense of the other subjects, as in this example from a Year 4/5 history lesson:

> *The pupils were asked to write instructions for making papyrus, using their knowledge of instructional texts from the literacy hour. There were no specific history objectives. Most of the lesson was taken up by pupils ordering a series of images associated with writing, presented on poor-quality photocopies. The teacher then showed the pupils the correct sequence, but failed to follow up the misconceptions about chronology which were evident in their work. There was no discussion of key historical concepts, such as continuity and change, or the nature of historical evidence. The lesson did not extend pupils' historical knowledge and the development of their writing skills was very slight.*

Schools' views of the impact of the NLS on standards and teaching

At the end of the first year of implementation, HMI were already reporting that the National Literacy Strategy had been a catalyst for improvement in the quality of teaching and for raising standards of literacy. After four years, schools share that initial positive judgement. Headteachers and teachers remark on pupils':

- greater awareness and understanding of genre
- improved knowledge and understanding of technical terminology in literacy
- ability to apply their knowledge and understanding of phonics to spelling.

75. There is a consistent view in schools that standards have improved, particularly in reading, although they claim that there have also been improvements in writing. Even where schools have an up-and-down pattern of test results, on the whole, headteachers believe that the strategy is making a longer-term difference.

76. The quality of teaching is thought by schools to have improved in a number of ways. Headteachers comment consistently on the following changes:

- improved planning for individual lessons and for sequences of lessons

- clearer objectives for lessons, combined with a greater purposefulness and a sharper focus on what pupils need to learn
- the direct teaching of skills, including punctuation, and a more organised approach to teaching spelling
- the provision of a more varied range of reading material
- improvements in teachers' subject knowledge, particularly about grammar
- a more structured approach to the teaching of writing
- the use of a greater range of teaching strategies, including the demonstration of writing
- better deployment of teaching assistants, supported by the training they have received
- overall, a more confident and consistent approach to teaching.

One headteacher observed that: 'The breakthrough was the teaching of reading rather than trying to find the time to hear individual readers', bearing out the observation by HMI at the end of the first year that 'the NLS has meant a considerable change to [teachers'] approach to the teaching of reading. There has been a considerable move away from the practice of "hearing readers" to one in which pupils are taught to read directly by their teacher'.

77. Overall, the implementation of the NLS has created a virtuous circle: as teachers have recognised that the strategy is working, their confidence in it has begun to rise and they have continued to improve their teaching, building on earlier work. For headteachers, it has provided an important lever for change, across the curriculum as well as in literacy.

78. Both the NLS and the National Numeracy Strategy (NNS) have been perceived to have affected the ways in which schools teach other subjects, including:

- much more direct teaching of the whole class in all subjects
- the establishment of three-part lessons
- increased use of plenary sessions at the end of a lesson to review learning and consolidate key teaching points
- an improved pace to teaching
- higher expectations of pupils
- the use of big books for shared reading in subjects other than literacy
- increased use of writing frames to help pupils structure their writing
- improved planning
- the setting of learning objectives for lessons, although these are usually much more specific for literacy than for other subjects.

Impact of the National Literacy Strategy on the teaching of English

79. The NLS framework has enabled schools to teach the national curriculum programmes of study for reading and writing directly and in detail. It has also begun to prompt them to think more clearly about how to teach literacy in other areas of the curriculum. Schools recognise, however, that they have given less attention to speaking, listening and drama, although there are some signs that they are taking action to improve provision.

80. Where schools report that they are developing speaking and listening, they do so especially in personal, social and health education, religious education, assembly and 'circle time'. They also feel that shared writing and the plenary session of the literacy hour provide opportunities for pupils to talk and listen to each other. Despite acknowledging the importance of oral work, however, schools rarely plan for it in the detail contained in the national curriculum programmes of study.

81. Most schools are beginning to find ways of teaching and applying reading beyond the literacy hour, although it is rarely planned systematically. Where reading takes place in this way, it includes:

- guided reading outside the literacy hour at the same time as other pupils are reading silently
- pupils being asked to use non-fiction for research in history and geography
- time being provided in the school library for pupils to browse and exchange books
- setting reading for homework: younger pupils might read with an adult while older pupils might read a chapter or two of a text before discussing it in a guided reading session
- following up extracts introduced in shared reading in reading to the whole class at the end of the day.

82. Last year's report on the NLS noted:

> *A large majority of schools allocate between seven and eight hours a week to English overall, but at present few schools have any coherent rationale for the work taught outside the literacy hour. As a matter of urgency, they need to conduct an audit of how time is used to teach English, both as a subject in its own right and within other subjects, in order to identify any gaps, either in the teaching of the national curriculum English programmes of study or the application of English in the rest of the curriculum.*[6]

There is still very little evidence that schools conduct systematic audits of this kind.

Use of ICT to support literacy

83. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) in the teaching of literacy continues to improve steadily, but remains very limited in around one in four schools. Teachers are becoming more confident in using it to support their literacy teaching and there is more evidence of its impact on pupils' work, particularly writing. This represents significant progress since the first year of the strategy. At that time, pupils' ICT skills were generally poor, most teachers lacked sufficient subject knowledge and confidence to use ICT themselves, few schools had an ICT suite where groups of

[6] The National Literacy Strategy: the third year. *Ofsted, 2001.*

pupils could be taught together and there was little use of ICT in the literacy hour.

84. There is still a big gap, however, between the schools where ICT is used effectively and those where its contribution to pupils' learning is very limited. In the latter, the use of ICT to support pupils and teachers is not systematic; ICT is rarely mentioned in the plans for the literacy hour and it makes little or no contribution to the teaching of writing. All these schools have made a start, however, and there are signs of progress. In some cases, for example, work is in hand to refurbish rooms as ICT suites and teachers are drawing up plans about how best to use them, while in other schools, improving the use of ICT is a high priority in the development plan. There are still a few schools where the poor quality of the hardware and a lack of software restrict progress.[7]

85. Many schools continue to find it hard to decide how best to use their ICT resources to support the teaching of literacy. More schools are teaching ICT in computer suites, allocating pupils one or two sessions each week. Where this work is related to literacy, it is generally concerned with research and non-chronological report-writing. In some of the best examples, teachers use projectors to give instruction to a whole group before the pupils work by themselves or in pairs on individual tasks. The work is linked to specific objectives so that the pupils practise and apply the ICT skills they have learned to develop their writing.

86. The use of computers for literacy by pupils in classrooms is mostly confined to individual work on phonics and spelling programs, and for composing and editing text on the computer. The copying of handwritten text onto the computer, which was common in the early days of the strategy, is now rare.

87. The wider use of ICT applications for literacy teaching, reported in 2001, has gained a little more ground, although it still involves only a minority of schools. In one school, for example, where ICT was included in most lesson plans, interactive whiteboards were used effectively in the literacy hour for shared writing, enabling all the pupils to see and contribute to the composition of texts. All the classes had access to the Internet through broadband technology and this enhanced pupils' use of computers for research.

88. The use of ICT to support the learning of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) has increased considerably since the introduction of the strategy, but there are still too many schools where it is insufficiently developed. In the schools with best practice, there is a wide range of equipment and software that is used systematically in all year groups to develop pupils' reading and writing. They are taught how to use computers, including keyboard skills, and are able to apply the ICT skills they have learned. The use of programs for word processing, spelling and phonics is particularly common and these often help pupils with SEN to acquire and reinforce knowledge and skills.

89. In the schools where ICT makes little or no impact on the learning of pupils with SEN, there is only limited use of computers for word processing and, even where this does occur, the pupils are held back by their poor knowledge of the keyboard and lack of typing skills. Staff are unaware of the potential of integrated learning systems to provide individual learning programs in the basic skills for pupils with SEN, and there is a very limited range of other software in use.

Teaching literacy in reception classes

90. From the early stages of the NLS, most Year R pupils were able to concentrate for 15 minutes daily on word-level work and for another 15 on text-level work. They responded well to the literacy hour and adapted easily to its structure; indeed, most Year

[7] *More detail on this subject can be found in* ICT in schools: pupils' achievement. *Ofsted, 2002.*

R pupils were working beyond the Desirable Learning Outcomes. At this stage, however, phonic work was often limited to the teaching of letter-sound correspondences and the rate at which pupils were taught these was often slower than that recommended by the framework. By the end of the first year, pupils were taught not only the necessary early phonic knowledge, but also the skills of hearing and identifying initial and final phonemes, although the speed at which the phonemes were introduced was still too slow in most schools.

91. By the second year, the majority of Year R teachers chose to implement a full literacy hour as soon as practicable, usually by the end of the autumn term. Where there was a good variety of relevant activities and the teaching was lively and interactive, even the youngest pupils took a good part in the work; they sustained their concentration and enthusiasm well. The NLS material, *Progression in phonics*, was helping teachers to increase pace, giving a significant boost to the speed at which Year R pupils were taught to read and spell. Text-level work was usually taught effectively in reception classes, especially when the teacher demonstrated good reading or writing strategies for the pupils. By this stage, Year R pupils were responding particularly well to the big books used for the initial shared text work with the whole class.

92. With the introduction of the foundation stage and its associated Early Learning Goals, most teachers planned their work using the QCA *Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage*. By the end of the third year, much of the teaching was good and it was rarely less than satisfactory. Most teachers spread the elements of the literacy hour throughout the day, following the advice of the NLS and the QCA, but they brought these elements together well before the end of the summer term to ensure that pupils were prepared sufficiently for a full literacy hour in Year 1.

93. By the end of the fourth year, teachers are now planning for and teaching literacy within the foundation stage curriculum in Year R with greater confidence. The quality of teaching in this year group continues to be good in the majority of lessons with some very good teaching, particularly in word-level work. There is very little unsatisfactory teaching. There is also much more effective phasing-in of the elements of the hour, although teachers with mixed-age Year R and Year 1 classes continue to teach a full literacy hour from the beginning of the autumn term, with varying degrees of separate provision for the youngest pupils. Pupils' responses are invariably positive. They concentrate well, are motivated and interested and, in the vast majority of lessons, make good progress.

94. Strengths of the good teaching include:

- careful planning which takes account both of the NLS framework objectives and the QCA *Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage*
- direct and effective teaching of phonics as a free-standing element
- good use of shared reading
- well-focused activities, including play, that reinforce the main teaching objectives
- skilful guided writing with an appropriate focus on segmenting phonemes for spelling, leading to good development of pupils' phonological knowledge to help them write independently
- well-focused plenary sessions
- the effective deployment of teaching assistants, especially in mixed-age classes to support the youngest pupils.

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Inclusion

Minority ethnic pupils and pupils with English as an additional language

95. There has been little change to the picture reported at the end of the third year. The majority of schools continue to organise a mix of in-class support and separate provision for pupils learning **English as an additional language** (EAL). There has been an increase in the number of schools who now see the benefits, for both staff and pupils, of partnership in teaching between the class teacher and the ethnic minority achievement grant (EMAG) teacher. A minority of schools, however, still do not make best use of EMAG staff: the withdrawal of pupils from the main lesson for support limits possibilities for EMAG staff and teachers to work together to support pupils.

96. Commitment to partnership in teaching remains important in raising the achievement of **minority ethnic pupils** and, in particular, of pupils with EAL. In the fourth year of the strategy, the quality of the majority of teaching involving mainstream teachers and staff from LEA support services is at least satisfactory and often good. Underpinning the best partnerships is a clear agreement which identifies targets for action and the contribution of each partner. Often, in these cases, both the school and the support service make good use of data to focus support where the need is greatest. The majority of schools give support within the classroom. At best, the planning for these jointly taught sessions sets out not only the overall contribution of the support staff, but also precisely how they will contribute to the different parts of the hour.

97. In some of the schools which have admitted **pupils from asylum-seeker families**, the strategy and, in particular, the framework are valuable in planning how to meet some of the specific needs of newly arrived pupils with little or no English. There have been a few very effective short-term induction programmes for these pupils which have drawn upon the word-level work in the framework, especially phonics, and other intervention programmes. These programmes have run successfully alongside the main literacy hours for the whole class.

98. Schools continue to become more confident at analysing data and deploying support staff where the need is greatest. Invariably, most support is used with pupils who are new to, or in the early stages of, learning English. Support for bilingual learners whose English is more advanced (second phase bilingual learners) is less well structured. Many schools do not make any specific provision and have no formal policy for their support. The use of pupils' first language is not always exploited fully to improve their learning and attainment. Schools continue to feel there is insufficient funding to provide support for EAL pupils other than those at the early stages of learning English.

99. Partnership can also extend beyond the classroom. In the case of some LEA services for **pupils from Traveller communities**, support staff provide good advice on appropriate texts for use in literacy hours which reflect Travellers' culture and lifestyles. A small number of LEA Traveller services have begun to provide data for schools which help to track pupils' progress.

100. Some of the most positive outcomes of the NLS, encouraged through training and guidance, have been the awareness of the benefits of partnership in teaching and of the important link between the analysis of data and the setting of targets for improvement.

Boys

101. The underachievement of boys, especially in writing, was signalled in the first year of the evaluation of the strategy. The gender difference in pupils' response to the

literacy hour and the fact that, overall, boys responded less positively than girls, was also a main finding at the end of the third year of implementation.

102. This year, the gap between the quality of response from boys and girls is closing. In the lessons where the teaching is of high quality, the response and progress made by boys are consistently good and there are no significant differences between boys and girls. In these lessons, boys and girls are equally eager to contribute. They participate enthusiastically and apply themselves well to the work. In the less effective lessons, invariably boys lose interest more quickly than girls: their concentration lapses significantly and they waste time.

103. More schools are taking steps to improve boys' reading and writing skills through:

- increasing the emphasis on demonstration by the teacher in shared writing
- supporting boys' writing through the use of writing frames
- making use of visual strategies in whole-class shared work to stimulate boys' interest and motivation to write
- through good questioning, including directing questions explicitly to boys, ensuring that all pupils take part in the lesson
- reviewing medium-term plans to ensure a better balance of writing genres, including those which might appeal particularly to boys, such as writing information texts
- purchasing additional texts, particularly those that appeal to boys
- making significant use of group and individual targets which motivate boys.

Pupils with special educational needs

104. Provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) has improved since 2001. There are fewer schools where provision is only satisfactory and more where it is good. Good provision for SEN pupils is characterised by a systematic whole-school focus on enabling all pupils, regardless of ability, to achieve the highest level of which they are capable. This approach typically includes:

- effective systems for assessing and tracking pupils' progress, using the framework objectives and a range of standardised assessments, as well as national and optional test data
- clear analysis of reasons for poor progress
- challenging but realistic curricular targets for individual pupils or small groups, discussed with the pupils in ways they can understand, and related explicitly to the framework objectives.

105. Building on systematic analysis and planning, the most successful schools minimise obstacles to pupils' progress, both in teaching and learning. This includes:

- changing the pace or structure of the lesson
- adapting the classroom or pupil groupings
- widening the range of teaching and support strategies
- deploying teaching assistants efficiently to support groups rather than individual pupils.

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106. The main weakness in provision continues to be a lack of co-ordination between whole-class and specialist work. In the minority of schools where provision is unsatisfactory, there is too great a reliance on withdrawing pupils for individual support and a lack of shared planning between the special needs teacher (usually the co-ordinator for SEN) and the class teacher. The result is that neither knows what the other is teaching, and there is too little systematic evaluation of pupils' progress and attainment. Even where provision is broadly satisfactory, the activities designed for pupils who are withdrawn for specific support are often not linked enough to whole-class work. Inconsistencies are more common when the SEN co-ordinator does not have enough time for influencing and monitoring whole-school provision.

107. There is a trend towards greater discernment in the teaching of pupils with SEN, particularly in terms of identifying the pupils for whom short-term intensive intervention might be the most effective approach. Intervention programmes such as Additional Literacy Support (ALS) and, more recently, Early Literacy Support (ELS) have helped schools to distinguish between pupils for whom short-term intervention is likely to be effective and a smaller core group whose literacy difficulties might prove to be more long-standing. A small number of schools have already found that both ELS and ALS have reduced the number of pupils with SEN related to literacy.

108. Teachers are now more confident in their ability to use the literacy hour to meet pupils' individual needs, and there is greater adaptation of its structure and pace, for example, through adjustments to the pace of questioning to give pupils with SEN more time to respond.

> *In a Year 5 class, the teacher maintained a brisk pace for most of the text-level work, but primed the SEN pupils well in advance with the questions they were going to be asked. He then slowed the pace down discreetly, before asking the questions, through use of a three-minute whiteboard activity. The pupils with SEN were able to answer successfully and feel that they were contributing to the considerable momentum and fun of the session.*

109. Partly as a result of their experience with ELS and ALS, teachers are now more likely to plan lessons in which pupils with SEN work in groups on specific activities. This can be effective, provided that the teacher bases the activities on the whole-class lesson and keeps to a minimum any occasions where pupils do not participate in whole-class teaching. However, where this is not carefully planned and monitored, it disadvantages pupils with SEN who too often miss key parts of the main class lesson, including the opportunity simply to interact with other pupils.

110. Teachers are increasingly aware of the implications of particular types of SEN for their teaching in the literacy hour and are able to match it more closely and effectively to the needs of individual pupils. For example, word-level work is often identified as particularly useful for pupils with language and communication difficulties.

111. Group and independent work pose the greatest challenges for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties or a significant delay in learning. Wherever possible, schools prefer to deploy teaching assistants to provide direct support for these pupils, and this is often effective. Teachers, however, do not always make sufficient use of alternative or supplementary strategies such as smaller, individually tailored tasks and structured reward systems.

112. Schools continue to use shared texts effectively with pupils with SEN. Increasingly, these pupils also benefit from other parts of the literacy hour where they are involved in oral work, such as in discussing writing with an adult in a small group. Many schools, particularly where pupils enter school with a low level of spoken language, make good use of these aspects of the literacy hour to enhance pupils' speech and social development.

113. Take-up of the P-scales has been slow. These scales were devised to support teachers in measuring the progress of pupils working at or below level 2. Although the number of schools using them to structure their assessment of pupils' progress has increased, only one in three schools do so. This means that there are too few objective measures of the progress these pupils have made. However, there is greater use of the framework objectives as a way of identifying, within pupils' individual education plans, exactly what pupils need to know and do to improve. This enables schools to track individual pupils' progress more rigorously while, at the same time, paying attention to the needs of these pupils within the planning for the whole class.

Role of teaching assistants

114. The role of teaching assistants has developed considerably over the last four years, due largely to their specialist training in interventions such as ALS and ELS. The majority of teaching assistants provide valuable support, making well-judged interventions to support and encourage pupils' learning and independence. This is a significant improvement since the first year of the strategy in which HMI reported, 'Schools are still coming to terms with how to deploy additional adults effectively', noting that in too many lessons they were under-used in whole-class work. They are now usually part of an effective teaching team, taking significant responsibility for group work within and outside the classroom, as well as providing effective support during whole-class teaching, both for the teacher and for individual pupils.

Leadership and management

Influence of the headteacher

115. Throughout the implementation of the NLS, reports have highlighted headteachers' leadership as vital in determining the progress made by schools. Leadership and management are at least satisfactory in eight in ten schools and good in six in ten. This continues the trend of steady improvement over the last four years. There are still significant weaknesses, however, in the leadership and management in one in ten schools, although this is better than the first year of implementation when the equivalent figure was one in five. The improvements reflect headteachers' increased knowledge and understanding of the NLS and their greater involvement in monitoring developments and making use of their findings.

116. In the most effective schools, the headteachers plan their strategies for improvement carefully and make sure they are understood by everyone. They make good use of assessment data, so that the planned improvements take full account of pupils' strengths and weaknesses. They ensure that responsibility for the NLS is shared and that all staff understand the direction of the school's work. For example, the analysis of national test and other data (including analysis of the relative performance of different groups of pupils), the observation of teaching (including the scrutiny of planning), and the analysis of pupils' work all help to pinpoint strengths and weaknesses in teaching. They organise high-quality training and involve teaching assistants in it.

117. The effective headteachers encourage fruitful collaboration among staff, for example, putting in place workable systems, including the use of ICT, to make it easier to share and adapt plans. They give active, practical backing to their literacy co-ordinators, so that they have the time, the knowledge and the status to observe lessons critically, provide feedback and support for teachers and analyse data and other information. Finally, these headteachers recognise that it is not sufficient to instigate change and do things differently; they also monitor and evaluate the impact of change, even when improvement might seem secure.

118. In the minority of schools where leadership and management are weak, the problems identified in the first year of implementation remain: the headteachers are unfamiliar with how the strategy is developing; they lack knowledge and skill in setting targets; and they delegate responsibility without providing enough support. Even where data are collected and targets set, ineffective headteachers do not do enough to make a difference to teaching and do not always tackle long-standing problems of staff deployment or weak teaching.

119. While it is undoubtedly harder for some schools than others to bring about improvements, there are good examples of schools in challenging circumstances which have improved significantly.

Influence of the literacy co-ordinator

120. Literacy co-ordinators continue to be important in raising standards. In almost nine in ten schools, the work of the literacy co-ordinator is satisfactory and in more than half it is good.

121. The co-ordinators are usually knowledgeable and effective; the best bring good humour, tact and persistence to their role. They encourage other staff to reflect on and analyse their own teaching through the demonstration lessons they give; they lead in-service training and give advice. The most effective co-ordinators analyse data well and use the outcomes to track pupils' progress. They are able to interpret data and are aware of the implications for teaching.

122. Although almost all co-ordinators have written an action plan which shows how the school intends to improve teaching and raise standards, only a few revise these plans regularly to take account of raised expectations and the effects of new initiatives.

123. The increasing importance of the role of co-ordinators is reflected in the national training which began towards the end of the summer term in 2002 and is expected to involve all co-ordinators of literacy and numeracy.

Numerical targets

124. During the first year of the strategy, only the most effective headteachers involved themselves sufficiently in analysing test data and setting targets. Over the last four years, this has become much more widespread and headteachers are aware of the value of numerical data as a way of focusing on improvement. Often with the help of LEAs, senior staff in schools have become skilled in setting targets based upon an increasingly sophisticated database of test scores and other assessments. ICT is being used more frequently to support this, although it sometimes takes too long to input data.

125. Occasionally, schools set targets which are based too much upon pupils' previous performance and do not take into account the potential of better teaching to raise standards. Identifying numerical targets for year groups and individual pupils, as well as for the whole school, is now more common. This supports headteachers and co-ordinators in monitoring progress and assigning extra support more precisely, such as identifying where extra EMAG support could be used to best effect.

Curricular targets

126. Numerical targets are necessary, but they need to be backed up by specific curricular targets that will affect what happens in the classroom. During the course of the strategy, there has been a significant increase in the number of schools making good use of curricular targets. In over three in four schools, their use is now at least satisfactory and in almost a half it is good.

127. LEA literacy consultants often assist schools in gathering accurate information about levels of attainment and identifying strengths and weaknesses across groups of pupils. From this information, schools are able to set curricular targets at whole-school and year-group levels, based firmly on accurate analysis of pupils' test data and written work.

128. Teachers need to know the pupils' weaknesses and then teach accordingly. One school established 'critical pathways' for each pupil, based upon analysis of assessment data:

> *The school begins by linking baseline assessment to P-scales. Targets are then set according to national curriculum sub-levels so, for example, the components of level B1 become targets for the term and all pupils have these. The individual analyses and targets influence the numerical targets for level 4 and level 5 at the end of Key Stage 2. The teachers group together pupils' individual writing targets and tackle them during guided reading and writing. Senior staff track a sample of pupils through the school to monitor progress. Key areas for development are identified in this way and used in long-term planning.*

129. The use of curricular targets for ability groups is increasing. For example, a teacher set a group of Year 3 pupils with below-average attainment the following targets:

- *use question marks correctly*
- *use more describing words when writing stories*

- *use commas in lists.*

The above-average group in the same class was encouraged to focus on:

- *good descriptions of place and time*
- *use of connectives such as 'however'*
- *correct use of speech marks.*

These targets influenced the teacher's marking of individual pupils' written work. This showed not only what had been achieved, but also a pupil's next steps.

130. The HMI report on the second year of the strategy warned against setting too many individual targets which could become unmanageable.[8] However, the setting of targets for groups of pupils with similar needs, which is now more common, enables teaching and support to be matched carefully and efficiently.

[8] The National Literacy Strategy: the second year, *Ofsted, 2000*

Training and support for the National Literacy Strategy

NLS consultants and regional directors

131. The NLS **consultants** have played a significant role in training teachers and supporting schools. Their impact over the last four years has been very positive, both in terms of face-to-face training, as well as through their contribution to a range of materials to support teaching, published nationally as well as within their own LEAs.

132. Schools continue to praise their work and value their contribution highly. They have been most effective in working with individual schools to identify and tackle very specific weaknesses, not relying solely on the school's own perceived needs or requests for help.

133. Their work has evolved from training teachers to become familiar with the basic structure of the literacy hour and the content of the framework to a sharper focus on improving teachers' subject knowledge, for example in the teaching of phonics, grammar and writing. They have also developed their own knowledge and skills and have used these expertly to provide better support for schools and individuals.

134. The **regional directors** have been pivotal in steering the work of the consultants and maintaining a watchful eye on developments both locally, within LEAs and nationally. Over the course of implementation, regional directors have responded quickly to emerging areas of need within the strategy. They have focused support on underperforming LEAs, although in some cases this has met with limited success.

135. A more recent initiative in the work of the regional directors has been the development, jointly with the NNS, of training for school improvement teams within LEAs.

Schools' views on NLS training

136. The strategy has provided substantial training since 1998. This has ranged from the three-day familiarisation courses in the summer of 1998 for headteachers, literacy governors and SEN co-ordinators to detailed, specialised courses on grammar at Key Stage 2. In addition, NLS consultants and Expert Literacy Teachers have given advice to schools and offered opportunities for the direct observation of good teaching. This year's evaluation sought schools' views on the training which had been most influential in altering teaching approaches and improving standards.

137. Schools felt that *Grammar for Writing*, *Progression in Phonics* and *Developing Early Writing* were influential, particularly where teachers had had little previous training in teaching grammar or phonics. The two courses on writing improved their understanding of shared and guided work. Teachers also found that the teaching approaches which were suggested worked for them in their own classrooms. For teaching assistants, ALS training in particular helped them to enhance their skills, enabling them to work more effectively and independently.

138. In the early days of the strategy, training in using the framework, with the emphasis on clear learning objectives, was also judged successful. In schools' views, training on the literacy hour itself also had a major impact, altering approaches and providing a clear focus for teaching and progression in pupils' learning.

Influences on literacy co-ordinators

139. Most literacy co-ordinators reported that the support and encouragement from their headteacher and colleagues made the greatest contribution to their effectiveness, adding weight to the finding that headteachers' leadership has been vital. Co-ordinators felt that whole-school policies and approaches made their roles easier, while the requirement to undertake an initial literacy and resources audit had encouraged discussion and the sharing of ideas. Time to observe and analyse teaching and to disseminate findings also featured strongly on co-ordinators' lists of influences, especially where there were competing claims for their time. In some cases, co-ordinators also reported receiving good support from their literacy governor.

140. Other important influences on their effectiveness were:

- cluster group meetings
- the NLS framework
- NLS consultants
- national NLS and LEA-led training
- the observation of Expert Literacy Teachers and observations in Beacon schools
- NLS materials.

141. Meetings of small groups of schools provided valuable opportunities for discussion, particularly where concerns were not always the focus of national advice such as, in the early stages, the teaching of mixed-age classes. Co-ordinators found they benefited when cluster group meetings had a particular focus, for example guided reading or guided writing. NLS consultants' attendance at such meetings was much valued because of their ability to inspire confidence. Co-ordinators also benefited from courses devised by their own LEAs to meet local needs, especially where these were run regularly and publicised effectively. Many co-ordinators attended high-quality training.

142. Co-ordinators held the view consistently that the NLS framework itself was influential. In addition, despite the weaknesses which have persisted in the teaching of the plenary sessions, they found this part of the literacy hour to be successful in encouraging teachers to evaluate their teaching more effectively and in involving pupils in reflecting on what they had learnt.

143. Published NLS materials, such as *Progression in Phonics* and *Grammar for Writing*, provided useful overviews, even when training had not been attended. Video materials and the opportunities to use CD-ROMs to support shared writing and shared reading were also valued.

144. It was clear, however, from evaluation in the most successful schools, that training which took place in classrooms through lesson observation and feedback, demonstrations and team-teaching was more effective overall than that which took place away from school or during out-of-school hours.

Support from LEAs

145. The quality of support provided by LEAs for the NLS has been uneven over the course of implementation and there has been little change in the past year. Although the majority of LEAs have put in place appropriate systems to monitor schools'

implementation of the strategy, a number of LEAs continue to cause concern.

146. Increasingly, link advisers and inspectors (LAI) are helping schools to analyse numerical data and agree targets, although they provide only limited advice on translating numerical targets into curricular targets. In the best cases, LAI are supportive but challenging to their schools: they require evidence about attainment and are willing to engage in a professional debate about the targets to be set, taking account of schools' detailed knowledge of their own pupils.

147. On average, LAI visit schools termly or half-termly. Schools requiring more intensive support, such as schools requiring special measures or causing concern to the LEA, are visited more frequently. The amount of monitoring of teaching and learning varies between LEAs as well as between schools within individual LEAs. In some, the LAI observe lessons regularly, sometimes jointly with the headteacher, and offer feedback. In others, there is very little monitoring. In the past, schools determined at least part of the focus for a visit; increasingly, the focus is more heavily prescribed by the LEA.

148. Headteachers are generally positive about the support of LAI, but the contribution LAI have made to NLS implementation is uneven. In a small number of schools, headteachers feel that their LAI has made no specific contribution in supporting and evaluating the implementation of the NLS. In others, especially where the LAI has specialist knowledge, for example in English or the foundation stage, headteachers have received valuable support.

Conclusion

149. In the four years since the NLS was introduced, it has brought about substantial improvements in the teaching of literacy in English primary schools. These improvements have been achieved through:

- widespread use of the NLS framework for teaching
- greater use of direct teaching with more precise teaching objectives
- a clearer structure to lessons
- raising teachers' expectations of pupils
- improved progression in pupils' learning and better continuity in teaching
- increased pace of teaching
- an entitlement for all pupils to a daily, concentrated period of teaching focused on reading and writing
- effective use of consultants as catalysts for changing practice in schools and improving the quality of teaching.

150. Despite these improvements, however, progress has been uneven. This year's English results at Key Stage 2 have fallen five percentage points short of the government's target. Last year's report referred to the need for reflection and analysis and this need still remains.

151. There are a number of weaknesses in the design and implementation of the strategy. Some of these have been inherent from the beginning:

❑ The guidance from the NLS on how to teach phonics was not helpful enough in enabling teachers to teach phonic knowledge and skills systematically and speedily from Year R onwards. The teaching of phonics got off to a poor start and it has still not had enough impact on Years 3 and 4.

❑ The 'searchlights' model of reading took a 'one-size-fits-all' approach and therefore placed too much emphasis, at the earliest stages of learning to read, on the use of a broad range of decoding strategies and not enough on phonics.

❑ Approaches to the teaching of reading, in particular shared and guided reading, were untested in this country. Teachers took a long time to get used to guided reading and there are still aspects of both that are unsatisfactory.

❑ Day-to-day assessment was not built into the strategy to enable teachers to adapt their teaching to changes in pupils' progress. Too much depended on the use of the closing plenary session.

❑ The design of the strategy did not place it firmly enough within the context of the national curriculum as a whole. Consequently, headteachers perceived it as a source of pressure on other subjects.

❑ In spite of the strategy's emphasis on the importance of headteachers' leadership and management in driving it forward, too many headteachers saw it as a classroom initiative. As a result, their own knowledge of it was weak and they did not see it as a tool for whole-school improvement.

- There were not enough links between strategy teams and LAI in many LEAs.

152. Other weaknesses have become apparent more recently:

- In responding to emerging weaknesses, the strategy has produced extra guidance and materials. While the materials themselves have been useful, schools have found it difficult to take an overview of all the elements and this has adversely affected the coherence of the teaching.

- Schools have had difficulty in using ICT as a way of accessing guidance and support, resulting in potentially helpful material failing to reach the people who need it.

- The strategy has not succeeded in helping schools to narrow the gap between the performance of boys and girls, particularly in writing, which is now wider than it was four years ago; nor has it increased sufficiently the proportion of boys achieving level 4 in writing at the end of Key Stage 2.

- Teacher recruitment difficulties and high levels of teacher turnover have adversely affected the impact of the strategy in some schools.

153. To tackle the deepest and most intractable of these problems will require further development of the strategy, as well as better and more challenging teaching across the board. It is imperative that the next phase of the strategy deals with embedding it, not just within the primary curriculum as a whole, but also in the way teachers work. There are still teachers who follow the framework and guidance with too little questioning and reflection. Schools have reached the stage where they need to make the strategy work for them – and that includes being critical of things that are not effective enough. A great deal has been achieved, but further progress will depend on an open, critical approach to the strategy at a national level. This report describes the strategy's successes, but it also draws attention to areas for improvement.

Executive summary of the technical report

154. In 1999 the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) was asked to organise a yearly testing programme to support the evaluation of the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) being undertaken by Ofsted. The testing programme was commissioned by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA). The evaluation was originally commissioned for three years' duration. However, at the end of testing in the third year, it was decided to extend the evaluation for a further year to track Year 3 pupils in 1999 to Key Stage 2 in 2002. Thus, a unique data set was established and it has been possible to track the progress of a cohort of pupils from Key Stage 1 through to Key Stage 2. This summary draws on data collected from the end of the first year of the NLS to the end of its fourth year of implementation.

155. The testing programme focused on pupils in Years 3, 4 and 5 and aimed to provide a detailed picture of changes in standards and progress from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2. Tests in reading, spelling and writing, similar in content to the QCA optional tests for Years 3, 4 and 5, were specially developed for exclusive use in the evaluation. For reading and spelling, age-standardised scores were calculated and, for each of the three test elements, pupils were awarded a national curriculum level.

156. A sample of 300 schools, provided by Ofsted, was asked to administer the English tests to all their Years 3, 4 and 5 pupils each summer term. Tests were despatched and administered in schools under secure conditions and completed tests were returned to NFER for marking. Schools were also asked to provide some background information about their pupils to inform the analysis. Raw scores and levels from the tests, along with background data, were used to assemble a database each year. A numbering system was devised so that individual pupils taking part in the testing could be tracked from one year to the next. Schools received feedback in terms of scores and national curriculum levels for each of their pupils. They also received charts and tables comparing their pupils' performance and progress compared to the whole cohort. Because of the confidential nature of the tests, pupils' test booklets were retained at NFER, except in the final year where they were returned to schools at their request.

157. In the first year of testing, 283 of the 300 sampled schools participated. The majority of these schools continued to support the evaluation throughout the course of the project and, in 2002, 256 schools participated for the fourth time. Substantial numbers of pupils were included in the database that has been built up over the four years (an average of around 10,000 pupils per year group) and the majority of these pupils were tested on more than one occasion. In each year of the evaluation, the sample of schools and pupils has been broadly representative of the whole school population in terms of size, type of school and geographical location. In the 2002 sample, there were slight differences in the distribution of Key Stage 2 performance when compared with the whole-school population. As in previous years, this was taken into account during the statistical analysis of the data.

158. Each year, a range of analysis strategies has been used. At a simple level, it was possible to compare the performance of whole-year groups in 1999, 2000, 2001 and 2002 to look for changes in average age-standardised scores over time. For spelling and reading, there were consistent gradual improvements in scores, in all three year groups, from summer 1999 to summer 2001. However, between 2001 and 2002, changes in age-standardised scores for both spelling and reading were minor, indicating that previous improvements have been maintained and that there now appears to be a levelling of pupils' performance. In writing in Years 3 and 4, however, the upward shift in age-standardised scores continued in 2002 at an equivalent rate to that observed between 2000 and 2001. Performance in writing in Year 5 has remained steady over the years.

159. This pattern is reflected in the distribution of national curriculum levels in each year of the evaluation. There was a gradual improvement in the level distributions for reading and spelling in the first three years of the evaluation. These improvements have been sustained in the final year of testing. In the case of writing in Year 3 and Year 4, improvement has continued, with a higher proportion of pupils reaching level 3 in 2002 compared with previous years and a smaller proportion not achieving level 2. The level distribution for writing in Year 5 indicates that, although the proportion of pupils achieving level 4 or above has remained very similar in 2002 when compared with 2001, the proportion of pupils achieving level 3 has improved and the proportion of pupils below level 3 has continued to fall.

160. For all three year groups, it is apparent that pupils' performance in reading continues to be markedly better than their performance in writing and spelling. For example, in 2002, almost half of the pupils reached level 4 or above in reading by Year 5, compared with only 10% in the writing test. In writing in Year 4, however, there was a substantial increase in the proportion of pupils achieving level 3 in writing between 2001 and 2002, indicating that the gap between performance in reading and writing at Level 3 may be closing. Generally, the rate of improvement in the distribution of levels year on year was similar across the three test elements, with the proportion of pupils failing to reach the lowest levels of each test steadily decreasing over the four years of the evaluation. For example, in Year 5 the proportion of pupils not reaching level 3 decreased by three percentage points in reading, 16 points in writing and five points in spelling between summer 1999 and summer 2002.

161. For pupils who were tested on more than one occasion between 1999 and 2002, it was possible to analyse the progress they made from year to year. Simple comparison of changes in average age-standardised scores and national curriculum levels were further examined using sophisticated multilevel statistical models. This statistical technique is used to examine data sets where there are many variable factors that might affect the outcome of the test. Applying a multilevel modelling technique enables the relationship between each individual factor to be measured, independently of all others, and thus the strength of the relationship between each factor and the outcome can be determined. It is very important to remember that age-standardised scores take into account improvements that are expected as a result of increasing maturity. A child of average ability in Year 4 who had an age-standardised score of 100 would be expected to have an age-standardised score of around 100 in Year 5. Any change in age-standardised score over time implies greater-than-expected change in the knowledge, skills and achievement measured by the tests.

162. The large amount of pupils' test scores gathered during the course of the evaluation has made it possible to map how pupils progress throughout the four years of Key Stage 2. Most schools provided NFER with prior attainment data in reading, writing and spelling for the end of Key Stage 1 assessments. In addition, the majority of schools consented to the use of their Key Stage 2 results for 2000, 2001 and 2002 for their pupils who were in Year 5 in 1999, 2000 and 2001 respectively. Comparing three different types of assessment (Key Stage 1, evaluation tests and Key Stage 2) has some inherent difficulties in terms of variation in test structure and outcome but, despite these, some useful observations can be made. Over the four years of the evaluation there have been changes in the patterns of attainment, not just in relation to the evaluation tests, but also in the profile of achievement at the end of Key Stage 1. The proportion of pupils in the evaluation sample coming into Year 3 assessed as level 1 or 'working towards' level 1 in reading and writing has been decreasing, although the proportion in 2002 was similar to that in 2001. In 1999, 17% of pupils in the evaluation sample had not attained level 2 in writing at the end of Key Stage 1; by 2002 the proportion had dropped to 12.5%.

163. Monitoring the progress of pupils in the sample schools over time has continued to show that progress in reading, writing and spelling appears to be faster in the final

two years of Key Stage 2. The majority of pupils assessed at level 3 in Year 5 go on to achieve at least level 4 at the end of Key Stage 2 and there are a number of pupils who progress more than one level between Years 5 and 6. For example, 94% of pupils at level 3A in Year 5 had progressed to level 4 or better in reading. A proportion of pupils progressed by more than one level between 2001 and 2002. Of those pupils who were at level 3A in the Year 5 reading test, 23% had progressed to level 5 by Year 6. Similarly in writing, 30% of those pupils assessed as level 3A in Year 5 reached level 5 in Year 6 in 2002. Further investigations were made into the characteristics of pupils who made progress by more than one level from Year 5 to the end of Key Stage 2. A statistical technique called logistic regression, which identifies factors similar to the way multilevel modelling does, was used to examine this issue. It was found that such pupils were more likely to be boys. Other background factors that affected pupils' progress from Year 5 to Year 6 were eligibility for free school meals, the level of special educational need and whether English was the first language.

164. From previous years' analyses, it is known that a number of background factors can affect the scores pupils achieve in their tests. During the evaluation, traditional statistical analyses and multilevel modelling have demonstrated relationships between some background factors and scores. By far the most significant relationship was between prior attainment (measured as the level achieved at Key Stage 1) and age-standardised scores, in all of the year groups tested. Pupils who performed well at Key Stage 1 were very likely to have higher scores in subsequent years. The multilevel model, taking into account the levels achieved at Key Stage 1, found that, with the exception of spelling in Year 4, girls performed better than boys in all English test elements. Pupils with higher levels of fluency in English had higher scores in all subjects. Taking into account all other factors, pupils belonging to Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnic groups were more likely to have higher scores in writing and spelling than pupils from other ethnic groups. In 2002, Black African children in Year 4 and Chinese children in Year 5 along with Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi children were performing better in spelling than all other groups. In 2002, Chinese pupils performed better in reading in Year 5 than any other ethnic group. From the first round of testing, it was evident that some background factors had a very strong relationship with lower scores: pupils eligible for free school meals and those with identified special educational needs generally had lower scores after allowing for differences in prior attainment.

165. The multilevel model was used to examine the effect of background factors on the progress that pupils in the evaluation made from year to year. In all four years of testing, girls achieved higher age-standardised scores than boys and a greater proportion of them reached the higher levels in the reading and writing tests. Between 2001 and 2002, girls made more progress than boys in reading from Year 3 to Year 4. However, in all other English test elements, girls and boys made equivalent progress. Pupils with lower Key Stage 1 results made more progress in spelling and reading from Year 3 to 4 and more progress in reading from Year 4 to Year 5 in 2002 than pupils with higher prior attainment. In 2002, pupils with special educational needs made more progress than those without between Year 3 and Year 4 for both spelling and reading and between Year 4 and Year 5 in writing. Pupils with lower levels of English fluency made less progress in writing between Years 4 and 5, but slightly more progress in spelling between Years 3 and 4. In 2002 pupils who had received additional literacy support could be identified for the first time. The multilevel model found that these pupils made more progress in reading and spelling between Year 3 and Year 4 and in reading between Years 4 and 5 than those who had not received extra support. In 2002, Year 5 autumn-born pupils made more progress than pupils born in the summer in both reading and spelling.

166. As in previous years of the evaluation, in 2002 various school-level factors were included in the model to investigate their relationship with attainment and progress. Throughout the course of the evaluation, it has generally been found that pupil-level factors have stronger relationships with scores and progress. However, some school

variables were found to have a significant effect on pupils' attainment and progress. For example, schools making effective use of their LEA co-ordinator made more progress in reading and writing between Year 4 and Year 5 and schools deemed to have an effective headteacher made more progress in reading between Year 3 and Year 4. Similarly, the quality of leadership offered by the school special educational needs co-ordinator was associated with better progress in writing between Years 4 and 5. Pupils from schools with more stable populations achieved higher scores in all English test areas in Year 4, but made equivalent progress to schools with less stable populations in all years and test elements. Pupils in larger schools achieved slightly lower scores in Year 4 reading and made slightly less progress in writing between Years 4 and 5. In 2002, the multilevel model found that pupils in metropolitan areas achieved lower scores in reading in Year 3 but made more progress between Years 4 and 5 than pupils in non-metropolitan areas.

167. To conclude, the first three years of the evaluation saw significant improvements in pupils' performance in all areas of the literacy tests. During the last year, 2001 to 2002, there is evidence to suggest that, generally, there has been a levelling of pupils' performance in spelling and reading. In writing, pupils' performance has continued to improve in Year 3 and Year 4 while levelling in Year 5. Average age-standardised scores did increase over and above what would be expected from 1999 to 2001; however, in spelling and reading, little change occurred from 2001 to 2002 and thus the distribution of national curriculum levels in Years 3, 4 and 5 was very similar in 2002 compared with 2001. The distribution of levels for writing reflect the continued improvement in Years 3 and 4. It is important to note that levels of achievement have been sustained in all test areas and that the proportion of pupils not reaching the lowest level measured by each test has continued to fall throughout the four years of the evaluation. These findings alone cannot assess the impact of the NLS, but they do provide sound statistical evidence that the improvements in achievement observed in the first three years of the evaluation, for all groups of pupils, have been maintained during the evaluation's final year.

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